Florida expands 'Don't Say Gay'; House OKs anti-LGBTQ bills

Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis can add more wins to his agenda targeting the LGBTQ+ community

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press
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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis added more wins to his agenda targeting the LGBTQ+ community as a state board approved an expansion of what critics call the “Don’t Say Gay” law Wednesday, and the House passed bills on gender-transition treatments, bathroom use and keeping children out of drag shows.

The Board of Education approved a ban on classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in all grades, expanding the law that bans those lesson up to grade 3 at the request of DeSantis as he gears up for an expected presidential run.

The rule change would ban lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity from grades 4-12, unless required by existing state standards or as part of reproductive health instruction that students can choose not to take. That’s the time when students are becoming aware of their sexuality.

The proposal will take effect after a procedural notice period that lasts about a month, according to an education department spokesman.

The DeSantis administration put forward the proposal last month as part of the Republican’s aggressive conservative agenda, with the governor leaning heavily into cultural divides ahead of his looming White House candidacy.

He previously directed questions to Education Commissioner Manny Diaz Jr., who said it was meant to clarify confusion around the existing law and reinforce that teachers should not deviate from existing curriculums.

"We're not removing anything here," Diaz Jr. said on Wednesday. "All we are doing is we are setting the expectations so our teachers are clear: that they are to teach to the standards."

The prohibition has drawn intense backlash from critics who argue it marginalizes LGBTQ+ people and has vague terms that result in self-censorship from teachers. Democratic President Joe Biden has called it "hateful."

It's not the only issue upsetting LGBTQ+ people in Florida. Also Wednesday, the House passed a bill to make it a felony to provide gender-affirming health care to transgender minors, another DeSantis priority.

"In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. Folks this is rock solid, irreversible, validated by science and our medical community. Period," said Republican Rep. Chase Tramont. "You are either male or female. This is not subject to one's opinion. It is demonstrable fact."

Democrats argued that ignoring gender dysphoria in children can be psychologically harmful, They said parents and doctors should make decisions on treatment, not government.

"Trans people are already dealing with the feeling of not feeling wanted, not being accepted, not being loved, not belonging. Do we want to treat them like they are worthless?" said Democratic Rep. Marie Paule Woodson. "This is a territory that we have no right of stepping into."

As they debated, a group of protesters shouted against bill sponsor Republican Rep. Randy Fine, chanting, "Racist, sexist, anti-queer, Randy Fine get out of here."

"We know that these are all just part of the governor's agenda to attack our community and to take rights away from people disguised under parents' rights," said Salvatore Vieira, a field manager for Equality Florida, who led the chants. "I fully believe in an equal and a beautiful Florida for everyone."

The House sent DeSantis another bill that bans children from an adult live performance, a proposal aimed at the governor's opposition to drag shows.

The legislation would allow the state to revoke the food and beverage licenses of businesses that admit children to adult performances. The DeSantis administration has moved to pull the liquor licenses of businesses that held drag shows, alleging children were present during lewd displays.

The House also passed a bill that will ban people from entering bathrooms other than their sex assigned at birth. It requires bathrooms in public places to be listed as Men, Women or Unisex.

DeSantis has made culture wars a priority as he gears up to run for the White House. Former President Donald Trump and other Republican presidential hopefuls have been increasingly attacking DeSantis' leadership, including an ongoing feud with Disney, one of the state's largest employers and political donors.

The entertainment giant publicly opposed the "Don't Say Gay" legislation last year, and, as punishment, DeSantis pushed lawmakers to give him control of a self-governing district that Disney oversees in its theme park properties.

Before a set of new DeSantis appointees could assume control of the district, Disney's board passed restrictive covenants that strip the incoming members of most of their powers, blunting the governor's retaliation.

DeSantis has directed the chief inspector general to investigate the Disney board's move and vowed to take additional revenge against the company through legislation.

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BREAKING

Florida Expands ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Policy To Older Students At DeSantis’ Request

Katherine Hamilton Forbes Staff
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Apr 19, 2023, 02:39pm EDT

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Updated Apr 19, 2023, 05:18pm EDT

TOPLINE The Florida Board of Education voted unanimously on Wednesday to bar the state’s middle and high school teachers from teaching students about sexual orientation or gender identity, an expansion of a state policy for younger students known by critics as the “Don’t Say Gay” law, which fueled nationwide controversies over LGBTQ protections and a feud between Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) and Disney.

Protesters demonstrate against Florida Gov. Ron Desantis' legislation aimed at weakening LGBTQ ... [+] AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

KEY FACTS

- The new policy bans instruction of sexual orientation and gender identity for grades 4 through 12, unless instruction is expressly required by state academic standards or is part of a reproductive health course.
- Teachers who don't follow the new ban could be suspended or have their teaching license revoked.
- The amendment, which does not require legislative approval, builds on Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act—dubbed by critics as "Don't Say Gay"—which prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.
- Education Commissioner Manny Diaz, who heads the state's education department, said the addition is intended to "provide clarity" about what teachers can and cannot teach, after the Parental Rights in Education Act received criticism for its vague

language that opponents said could be interpreted to extend to all grade levels.

KEY BACKGROUND

DeSantis, who is widely expected to run for president, signed the Parental Rights in Education Act into law in March 2022 and put forward the proposed expansion to middle and high school students. He has not commented on the amendment since the School Board passed it. The bill was a keystone in a spate of laws DeSantis has championed backing right-wing policies on sexuality, identity and race, many of which are related to education and have drawn stiff criticism from the Biden Administration and others. He announced plans in February to block state colleges from having programs on diversity, equity and inclusion, and critical race theory. Florida officials have also enacted rules blocking medical care, including puberty blockers and hormone therapy, for transgender youth, reflecting a nationwide trend of restrictions on gender-affirming medical treatment.

TANGENT

Along with sharp backlash from Democratic politicians, the Parental Rights in Education Act's passage sparked a conflict with the major Florida employer Walt Disney Co., whose then-CEO Bob Chapek condemned the legislation after previously avoiding taking a public position on it. In response, DeSantis and other Florida lawmakers threatened to repeal a law that establishes the area surrounding Walt Disney World Resort as its own governmental authority with the same powers as a county government. The repeal was passed in April 2022 and is set to go into effect on June 1 of this year. But the governmental authority that covers Disney World—previously known as the Reedy Creek Improvement District—passed a last-minute agreement giving Disney broad power over

development in the district earlier this year, leading DeSantis to push to overturn the deal.

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Here Are All The States Banning Or Restricting Trans Or Gender-Affirming Care (Forbes)

DeSantis Ramps Up Disney Feud With New Measures Against Theme Park (Forbes)

Here's How DeSantis And His Board Could Change Disney World (Forbes)

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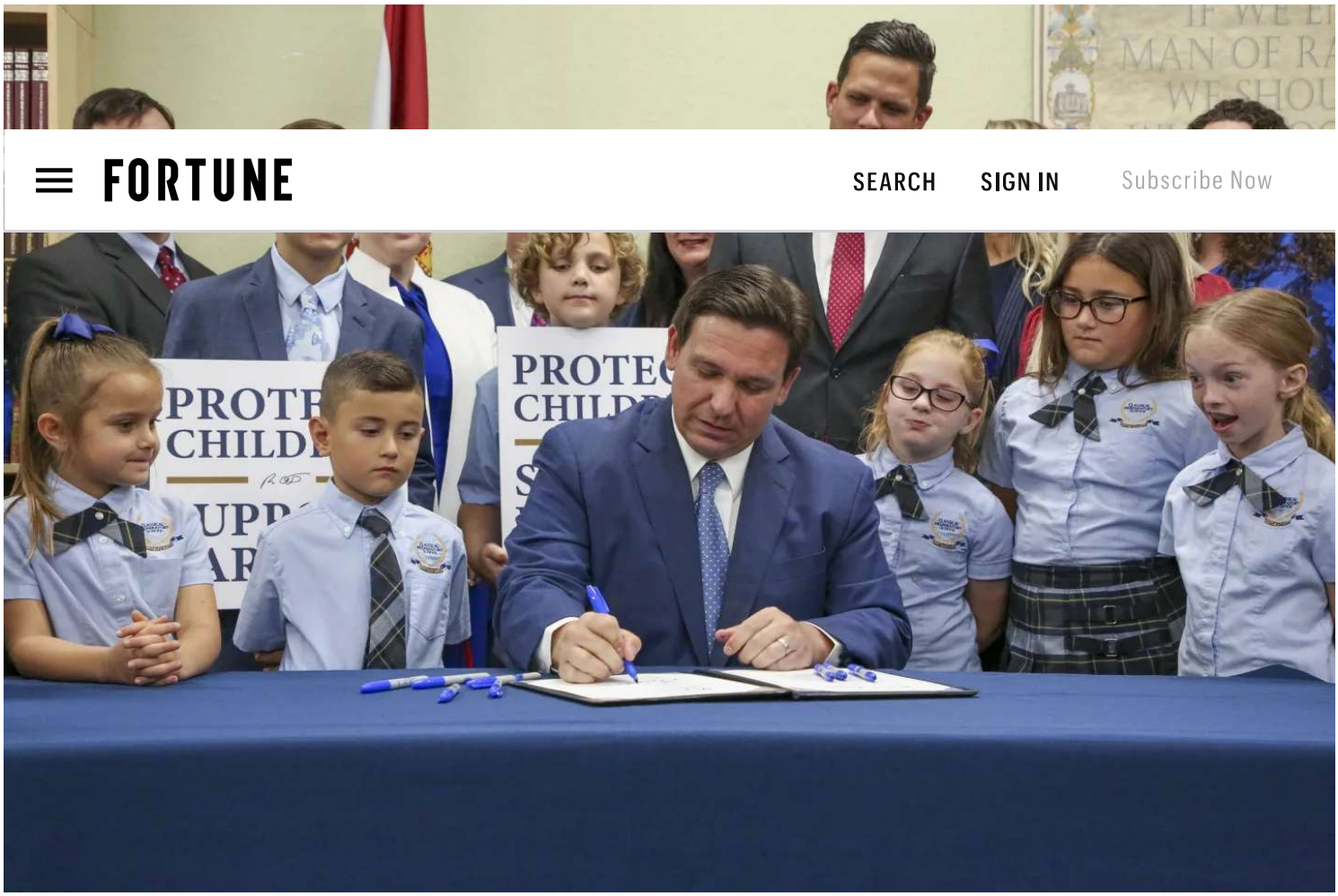
Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis expands 'Don't Say Gay' bill through high school as LGBTQ groups call it an 'assault on freedom'

BY **ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE** AND **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

April 19, 2023 at 2:58 PM EDT



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signs the Parental Rights in Education bill at Classical Preparatory school on March 28, 2022, in Shady Hills, Fla.

DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD—TAMPA BAY TIMES/AP

The Florida Board of Education on Wednesday approved a ban on classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in all grades, expanding

the law critics call “Don’t Say Gay” at the request of Gov. Ron DeSantis as he gears up for an expected presidential run.

The proposal will take effect after a procedural notice period that lasts about a month, according to an education department spokesman.

The rule change would ban lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity from grades 4-12, unless required by existing state standards or as part of reproductive health instruction that students can choose not to take. Florida currently bans such lessons in kindergarten through third grade.

The DeSantis administration put forward the proposal last month as part of the Republican’s aggressive conservative agenda, with the governor leaning heavily into cultural divides ahead of his looming White House candidacy.

DeSantis has not commented on the proposal. He previously directed questions to Education Commissioner Manny Diaz Jr., who said it was meant to clarify confusion around the existing law and reinforce that teachers should not deviate from existing curriculums.

“We’re not removing anything here,” Diaz Jr. said on Wednesday. “All we are doing is we are setting the expectations so our teachers are clear: that they are to teach to the standards.”

The prohibition, which began last year with the law banning sexual orientation and gender identity lessons in kindergarten through third grade, has drawn intense backlash from critics who argue it marginalizes LGBTQ+ people and has vague terms that result in self-censorship from teachers. Democratic President Joe Biden has called it “hateful.”

The current law is also the root of an ongoing feud with Disney, one of the state’s largest employers and political donors.

“Let’s put it plainly: This is part of the governor’s assault on freedom,” Joe Saunders, senior political director of the LGBTQ advocacy group Equality Florida, said in a statement, adding the policy will “further stigmatize and isolate a population of young people who need our support now more than ever.”

The entertainment giant publicly opposed the legislation last year, and as punishment, DeSantis pushed lawmakers to give him control of a self-governing district that Disney oversees in its theme park properties.

Before a set of new DeSantis appointees could assume control of the district, Disney's board passed restrictive covenants that strip the incoming members of most of their powers, blunting the governor's retaliation.

DeSantis has directed the chief inspector general to investigate the Disney board's move and vowed to take additional revenge against the company through legislation.

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